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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ASHGABAT 000963

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DEPT. FOR SCA/CEN (PERRY)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/13/2016

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: MYRADOVA DIES IN PRISON, CIRCUMSTANCES UNKNOWN

REF: A. ASHGABAT 910

- [¶](#)B. ASHGABAT 840
- [¶](#)C. ASHGABAT 698
- [¶](#)D. ASHGABAT 652

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Jennifer L. Brush for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

[¶](#)1. (C) Sona and Mara Myradova notified embassy September 14 that their mother, Ogulspapar Myradova, was reportedly dead. After hearing rumors and under continued surveillance, the daughters were asked by Turkmenistani authorities to identify their mother's body at the city morgue after it had been released from Owadan-Depe Prison. Embassy personnel visited the morgue, saw the release of the body to the family and viewed the body at the family residence. The body had several wounds, impressions and injuries. Although Turkmenistani security personnel observed the proceedings, there was no active interference following the arrival of embassy personnel. The cause of death is unknown as no report accompanied the body, which had been autopsied. Charge met with OSCE and British ambassadors to discuss the case and all agreed OSCE Ambassador Djigic would ask the Chairman in Officer to send a letter to President Niyazov requesting an explanation for Myradova's cause of death. End summary.

Myradova Daughters Receive Hints Their Mother is Dead

[¶](#)2. (C) The Myradova daughters approached the embassy September 14 in the morning to pass news they had received regarding their 58-year old mother, Ogulspapar Myradova. (Note: Myradova's case is complicated, see reftels, but has been portrayed by the media as a human rights issue. End note) After hearing from neighbors that their mother had died, their brother went to the police to ask about their mother. The police would not confirm or deny their mother's death, but simply asked how they learned of this information. The daughters had no additional information regarding their mother's condition, and requested embassy assistance.

¶3. (C) Also during the conversation, the sisters informed embassy that there had been increased law enforcement activity around their home. They noted their continued inability to visit their mother and the bureaucratic hurdles they encountered in trying to pursue due process in Turkmenistan. In the course of these reported discussions, they learned that their aunt and uncle, who live overseas, "had become active again." The sisters also were advised that if "they had not contacted certain people, things would be more normal." The sisters associated RFE/RL reporting with this notification as they heard that "too much information is getting out." (Note: This is the first time the daughters have linked their mother's situation with RFE/RL to embassy personnel. End note)

¶4. (C) The sisters told embassy that the verdict of their mother's August 25 trial had not yet been finalized. The appeal process cannot start until written notification of the verdict is made public.

Myradova Daughters Receive Confirmation of Mother's Death

¶5. (C) Approximately one hour after the earlier conversation, the Myradova sisters contacted the embassy again and requested a meeting. In the interim, a Human Rights Watch representative currently visiting Tblisi, Georgia informed embassy that her contacts in Bulgaria (presumed to be the Myradova relatives in exile) had heard of Myradova's death. OSCE representatives also joined this meeting at the embassy.

¶6. (C) The Myradova sisters said that after returning home from their earlier visit to the embassy, a neighbor passed

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them a note left by a "Major Wepa" from the police department. After contacting the police department, a vehicle arrived to the residence to transport them to the city morgue. An official at the morgue informed the sisters they needed to submit a letter assuming possession of the body and noting the burial place before they could view the body. The sisters refused, insisting that they see the body first. The sisters feared that signing a letter acknowledging their mother's death would enable the government to kill their mother. Their argument assumed that the government, after receiving the letter, would not release the body. The morgue official told the sisters they had 20 minutes to write the letter or the body would be buried in eight hours time.

¶7. (C) Amidst this process, the sisters approached another worker at the morgue who told them the body arrived September 13 at 12:30 p.m. Instead of the Yashlyk prison where the sisters had believed their mother had been held, the morgue employee stated that the body had come from the Owadan Depe prison, which houses a number of political prisoners. Their conversation was interrupted by another official who silenced the informative morgue employee.

Trip to the Morgue to Identify the Body

¶8. (C) After the conclusion of the embassy meeting, emboffs traveled to the city morgue where they met the sisters again. After introductions with morgue officials, the sisters again requested to view the body. The official on duty appeared cooperative, but was not able to produce the body immediately. For approximately 30-40 minutes, emboffs and the Myradova sisters waited. The sisters arranged for a vehicle to transport the body and made numerous phone calls during this time. The morgue officials then insisted on a signature before viewing the body, however they eventually allowed the sisters to view their mother's body out of view of emboffs. Amid cries and shrieks, the sisters screamed in unison "oni ubili, oni ubili" "they killed (her), they killed

(her)." Soon the body, wrapped in a thick, raw cotton shroud, emerged and was loaded into the vehicle. The sisters invited emboffs to follow them to their residence to view the body.

Condition of the Body

¶ 9. (C) After arrival to the residence, family members carried the body up to their second floor apartment. After resting the body on the floor, the sisters uncovered the head of their mother. They had not viewed the rest of the body at the morgue. Eventually they uncovered the entire body for emboffs to view. Following is a description of injuries and markings observed by emboffs:

- A vertical one to two inch (in length) gouge in the middle of her forehead, which appeared to extend deeper than the epidermis. The wound was red. No bruising was observed.

- In contrast to her light tan complexion, emboffs observed a uniform, smooth, dark impression around her neck of about half an inch in diameter. No bruising was observed around this impression.

- Two or three areas of one hand had the skin flayed back with open, red wounds. The wounds were very small - the largest one measuring less than the size of a dime.

- The ankle area of one leg was swollen and bruised.

- A large bruise appeared on her lower thigh.

- Her mid-section from her neck to waist had been sown back together, indicative of an autopsy.

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Emboffs did not observe any other marks or bruising, but also did not have an opportunity to observe the back of her body. The daughters speculated that the body had been in cold storage for several days and also claimed that the wounds on their mother's hand were indicative of electric torture. The family has not yet received any paperwork from the authorities regarding their mother's death and an explanation of the cause has not yet been provided by Turkmenistani authorities.

Next Steps from Ashgabat

¶ 10. (C) The Charge met with OSCE Ambassador Ibrahim Djigic and U.K. Embassy Ambassador Peter Butcher on September 14 after emboffs returned from viewing the body. Djigic said he would ask that OSCE Chairman in Office Karel de Gucht write a letter to President Niyazov demanding an explanation of Myradova's death while in custody. The embassy expects to maintain contact with the two daughters, but will not take an overt diplomatic next step until the OSCE request has run its course.

Press Inquiries

¶ 11. (U) Post already is receiving press inquiries on the Myradova case and is replying, "The U.S. Embassy is collecting the facts regarding this case and has no comment at this time."

Comment

¶ 12. (C) The Myradova case has been complicated from the

beginning. While human rights organizations and the media emphasized that she was being persecuted for her job as an RFE/RL reporter, her RFE/RL connection was never an issue raised by the government. The fact is she is dead, and there is suspicion that she was killed, but the evidence is not conclusive. Releasing the body of a political prisoner to the family is an unprecedented act. The usual course of action is a series of rumors regarding the alleged death in prison of a prominent detainee until a credible contact can verify that the information is accurate. Scores of prisoners arrested for the alleged November 2002 assassination attempt of President Niyazov have not been heard of since their detention. There are many high-level government officials who were imprisoned and their fate is unknown. That the government would conduct what appears to be an autopsy and release the body to the family, knowing the international attention that has already been focused on this case, leaves much speculation about the cause of death. Post is waiting for the family to deliver photos of the corpse and possibly the autopsy report for the official cause of death. Post will continue to monitor all local developments and report them immediately. End Comment.

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